The Little Book of Mental Health LifeHacks

how to look after your own mental health

Written by the Somerset Young Mental Health Champions.

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We believe that mental health is something we *do* not something we *have*. It's about doing things that help keep us well and happy, or that help us feel better when things are tough. We've come up with some tried and tested LifeHacks to help us to help ourselves and other young people. Now we want to share them with you too.

To see some more information and even more LifeHacks please visit:
cypsomersethealth.org/lifehacks

1. Be kind to yourself

It's so important not to be too hard on yourself and to be your own best friend. Remember, if you wouldn't say it to or about your best friend then don't say it about yourself. Having a negative internal voice can really bring you down.

Try this! You could try to put a face to your inner critic, draw or sketch them and give them a voice. By doing that, you externalise the thoughts: they're no longer coming from you but an annoying little gremlin who is probably wrong.

True Story

"When a negative thought popped into my head I thought it was just an accurate reflection of the way things really are. But I've since come to see that these thoughts only show one point of view.

And there's always another point of view available if we choose to look for it. For example I really hate my larger legs because they made me very self-conscious when wearing shorts or skirts but I've since come to see they show off my strength and fitness and means I am great at playing rugby - a game I love!"

Find out more: This worksheet from **Moodjuice** is really helpful for challenging negative thoughts.

2. Do activities you enjoy

Finding time to do activities that you enjoy such as art, poetry or sport, can really help you get more out of life and think less about your problems. Doing these activities is NOT time-wasting as they are an important part of keeping your life in balance.

Try this! Check out this **Pinterest** page for ideas about craft activities for mental health. Locally there is **Creative Somerset** events page for activities that you might be interested in getting involved in.

True Story

"I found it really hard to talk about what I was going through, but I found that through art I could express what was going on in my head and tell my story in pictures which really helped me. I have also been volunteering for Somerset Wildlife Trust in their work with a pre-school. The joy of looking after children and helping them to learn had a big impact on my happiness and attitude."

Find out more: This link has more information on finding the right work-life balance for you, which could be especially helpful if you have exams coming up!

3. Talk to someone about how you feel

Talking about how you are feeling can help make things feel more manageable. You could talk to a friend or a trusted adult. Your GP can also help, and can refer you to a person who is qualified to deal with mental health issues.

If you need to talk to someone now, see the final pages of this booklet for details on all the immediate telephone and online support available to you. Always call 999 if there is an emergency.

Try this! You could try **these tips** for starting a conversation about how you feel, or page 19 of the **Rethink Young People's Toolkit** Has an activity on 'Preparing to Talk'.

True Story

"I spoke to my form tutor as I could not see a way forward or how to change things in order to look after my own well-being. They helped me find the right track and now I feel able to handle things even on the most difficult days. And if I wobble, I know I have people around me who want to help."

Find out more: Talking is good for you. **Here's** some information about the benefits of talking therapies.

4. Do E.A.S.Y. things that make you feel good

Take the E.A.S.Y. route to improving your mental health: Eat healthily, be Active - exercise boosts your mood, get plenty of Sleep, and try Yoga or mindfulness for relaxation.

Try this! Download the free **Headspace Take 10** app which teaches you mindfulness and meditation.

True Story

"Mindfulness meditation has made a significant improvement in my life and my mental wellbeing. Along with changing my diet, exercising more and doing brain training, this has given me clarity and a sense of calm without the side-effects of medication. I would highly recommend."

Find out more: Mood Cafe provides a range of podcasts to listen to about mental health and nutrition, sleep, exercise and relaxation.

5. Spend time with your friends, not online

Being face-to-face with the right people that genuinely care about you can really help you feel good. Just being with trusted supportive friends and spending time hanging out, talking and laughing can make a huge difference to how you feel. Avoid people that make you feel bad about yourself and make sure you spend time offline when you need it.

Try this! Pick up the phone and speak to a friend to arrange to do something fun together. Phoning is usually better than texting. Your friend will hear how you're feeling and you'll feel more connected. Much better than trying to fit it into a short text.

True Story

"The best thing my friend did for me was that they just accepted me as I was. They kept coming to see me even though I didn't seem to want them and they made me laugh."

Find out more: The Young Minds website has more useful information about talking to your friends about your mental health.

6. Keep a journal or blog

Keeping track of how you're feeling can be really helpful. Having a notebook, diary, journal or mood book can help you understand how you're feeling as time passes. Maybe there's a pattern to how you feel? Is it certain times of the week or month? Is it to do with people that you're spending time with? Is it caused by something that's happening at school or college?

Try this! You could use a mood app like **Mood Panda** to see if it works for you. Or try the **1 Second Everyday** app for a speedy approach to journaling.

True Story

"My friend was drinking too much and I was worried that it wasn't helping him feel healthy. I spent time talking with him and encouraging him to drink less. After a while it started to help. Now he doesn't drink much at all."

Find out more: This article explores how keeping a diary makes you happier.

7. Look at the bigger picture

You are more than any diagnosis or issue. Don't be defined by the mental health struggle that you're experiencing now. Be defined by the person you are, not how you feel. If it won't matter in a year, it's not worth worrying about so much now.

Try this! Think big, have a play with some life goals and where you see yourself in one year, five years and ten years. Have a think about some baby steps towards those goals. Remember sometimes it only takes one step onto a new path to change your life for the better.

True Story

"I was feeling really stressed and anxious as I had so much on and kept saying yes to everything as I thought it would help me achieve my dreams. When I took some time out to stop and think about it all, I started being able to say no to some stuff and life felt less stressed as a result. I still need to work on saying no but I like to take time to figure out my next steps sometime."

Find out more: This worksheet can help you work through issues to the bigger picture.

8. Learn more about mental health

Be informed: there's lots of really useful information out there. Avoid trying to diagnose yourself, but you could look up tips to help you manage specific issues you might be experiencing.

Try this! Make a self-help list for yourself around the specific issue you might be experiencing eg. tips that help if I feel anxious.

True Story

"Finding out more about my condition helped me realise there were certain triggers I could find helpful to avoid. Knowing this made me feel more in control."

Find out more: You could try self-help books or trusted online support such as the **Young Minds** website. You can also download the **In Hand app** which helps you record your own mental health and provides tools that can help.

9. Stick to a daily routine

Eat a healthy meal at regular intervals. Going for a short walk in the fresh air can really help. If there's a routine you find harder to stick to, give yourself a reward when you do it. Maybe a bubble bath at the end of the day is your way of being kind to yourself.

Try this! Write a simple routine for yourself and stick to it for a few weeks, see if it helps. Don't be afraid to change it until you find the right balance for you. Does a bath before bed help you sleep? What time is the best bedtime for you? How many hours of sleep do you need? You could try using reminder lists or calendars on your phone or downloading an app like **Remember the Milk** to plan and stick to a routine that works for you.

True Story

"I realised very quickly that morning and bedtime routines were essential to my day. By making a simple change in my day-to-day living, my life has improved. I feel much happier and calmer."

Find out more: This Sleep booklet from the Mental Health Foundation has suggestions for daily routines and sleep hygiene for better sleep.

10. Ask for help

Asking for help is always a good idea. There are lots of well-trained, trusted adults that can help and advise you.

Try this! Did you know that your GP can help? Talk to them and share your concerns. They will be able to tell you what help is available locally. You can also search local counsellors by looking at the **British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy website.** That way you know they're qualified. Some counsellors may be free for young people, others you might have to pay for. Your school or college may provide counsellors or group activities which could be helpful.

True Story

"I really needed some help because I couldn't confide in my parents. I asked my friends to help me out. They encouraged me to see a doctor and came along with me to the appointment, we used the **Doc Ready** *site to prepare for the appointment together and ask the right questions. Asking for help was the right thing to do - now I've got the support I need."*

Find out more: Check out **The Mix** which offers support to under 25s (Helpline 11am-11pm 0808 8084994). They also offer a free telephone counselling service. You could also download the **Safespot** app. It can give you strategies to help yourself.

Further help and information

You can contact any of the organisations below for more advice or support.

ChildLine

Childline offers free and confidential help for young people in the UK 24/7. You can call free on 0800 1111, speak to a counsellor online or visit the explore section on their website for information and advice on a range of topics.

Samaritans

Samaritans offers free and confidential help in the UK 24/7, you don't have to be suicidal to get in touch. You can call free on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org or visit a local Somerset Samaritans Branch.

The Mix

The Mix offers free and confidential support to the under 25s. They offer a free helpline 08088084994 available 11am-11pm every day. Email and webchat support are available at their website. They can also offer a free telephone counselling service.

Youth Welbeing Directory

The Youth Wellbeing Directory provides a list of local and national organisations for anyone up the age of 25 to find support, along with important information you may find helpful.

In an emergency you should always ring 999.